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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 004424

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR MOPS IZ KU NATO

SUBJECT: GOK APPROVES NATO REQUEST FOR TANK SHIPMENTS,
REGISTERS CONCERN

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) During a meeting with the Ambassador on October 15, Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Salem Al-Sabah agreed to a NATO request to accept Iraq-bound T-72 tanks at a Kuwait port but registered strong GOK concern about the substance and optics of the shipment. "We will give approval, but we are concerned," the FM stated. "The nature of these weapons is offensive, designed to conduct brisk operations across borders," he added. "They formed the backbone of the Iraqi Republican Guard." He added that the GOK defense establishment is also "extremely" concerned about the "state of flux" within the Iraqi armed forces and the structure of Iraqi soldiers' loyalties.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador reminded the FM that the shipment would also include Greek surplus armored personnel carriers. Shaykh Mohammed said that procuring the APCs "made sense" in terms of internal security but that the tanks "were designed to beat armies, not rebels." Shaykh Dr. Mohammed repeated his request for Ambassador to share the GOK message. "We want to be helpful," he concluded, "but want to register the concern."

¶3. (C) Comment: Unloading of surplus T-72s (the same models Saddam used to invade) at a Kuwaiti port should not be viewed by NATO as a public affairs opportunity.

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LEBARON